

T H E
L O U N G E R.

[N^o LXIII.]

Saturday, April 15. 1786.

To the LOUNGER.

*An is mihi liber cui mulier imperat? cui leges imponit, præscribit, vetat
quod videtur?*
CICERO.

S I R,

I Am a middle-aged gentleman, possessed of a moderate income, arising chiefly from the profits of an office, of which the emolument is more than sufficient to compensate the degree of labour with which the discharge of its duties is attended. About my forty-fifth year, I became tired of the bachelor-state; and, taking the hint from some little twinges of the gout, I began to think it was full time for me to look out for an agreeable help-mate. The last of the juvenile tastes that forsakes a man, is his admiration of youth and beauty; and I own I was so far from being insensible to these attractions, that I felt myself sometimes tempted to play the fool, and marry for love. I had sense enough, however, to resist this inclination, and, in my choice of a wife, to sacrifice rapture and romance to the prospect of ease and comfort. I wedded the daughter of a country-gentleman of small fortune, a lady much about my own time of life, who bore the character of a discreet prudent woman, who was a stranger to fashionable folly and dissipation of every kind, and whose highest merit was that of an excellent house-wife.

When I begin by telling you, that I repent of my choice, you will naturally suppose, Mr Lounger, (a very common case), that I have been deceived in the idea I had formed of my wife's character. Not at all, Sir; I have found it true to a tittle. She is a perfect paragon of prudence and discretion. Her moderation is exemplary in the highest degree; and as to œconomy, she is all that I expected, and a great deal more too. You will ask, then, of what it is that I complain. I shall lay my grievances before you without reserve.

A man, Sir, who, with no bad dispositions, and with some pretensions to common sense, has arrived at the age of five and forty, may be presumed to have formed for himself a plan of life, which he will not care hastily to relinquish, merely to gratify the caprices of another. I entered the matrimonial state with a firm resolution not to quarrel with my wife for trifles; but really, Sir, the sacrifices daily exacted on my part, and the mortifications I have been forced to submit to, are at length become so numerous, and so intolerable, that I must either come to a downright rupture, or be hooted at for a silly fellow by all my acquaintance.

Before I married, having, as I already informed you, a decent income, I thought myself intitled to many of those little indulgences to which a social disposition inclines a man who is possessed of the means of gratifying it. The necessary business in which my office engaged me occupying several hours of the day, it was my highest

pleasure to pass the evenings with a few sensible friends, either at my own lodgings, at theirs, or in the tavern. I found myself likewise a very welcome guest in many respectable families, where, as the humour struck me, I could go in at any hour, and take my part of a domestic meal without the formality of an invitation. I was a member too of a weekly club, which met on the Saturday evenings, most of them people of talents, and some of them not unknown in the world of letters. Here the entertainment was truly *Attic*. A single bottle was the *modicum*, which no man was allowed to exceed. Wit and humour flowed without reserve, where all were united by the bonds of intimacy; and learning lost her gravity over the enlivening glass. *O noctes cœneque Deum!*

As my profession was a sedentary one, I kept, for the sake of exercise, a couple of good geldings, and at my leisure hours contrived frequently to indulge myself in a scamper of a dozen miles into the country. It was my pride to keep my horses in excellent order; and when debarred by business from riding them, I consoled myself with a visit to the stable. Shooting was likewise a favourite amusement; and though I could not often indulge it, I had a brace of springing spaniels, and a couple of excellent pointers. In short, between my business and amusement, my time passed most delightfully; and I really believe I was one of the happiest bachelors in Great Britain.

Alas, Sir, how little do we know what is for our good! Like the poor gentleman who killed himself by taking physic when he was in health*, I wanted to be happier than I was, and I have made myself miserable.

My wife's ruling passion is, the care of futurity. We had not been married above a month before she found my system, which was to enjoy the present, was totally inconsistent with those provident plans she had formed in the view of a variety of future contingencies, which, if but barely possible, she looks upon as absolutely certain. The prospect of an increase to our family (though we have now lived five years together, without the smallest symptom of any such accident), has been the cause of a total revolution of our domestic œconomy, and a relinquishment on my part of all the comforts of my life. The God of Health, we are informed, was gratified by the sacrifice of a cock; but the God of Marriage, it would seem, is not so easily propitiated; for I have sacrificed to him my horses, my dogs, and even my friends, without the smallest prospect of securing his favour.

In accomplishing this œconomical reformation, my wife displayed no small address. Lord, Sir, what ways women have of working out their points! She began by giving me frequent hints of the necessity there was of cutting off all superfluous expences; and frequently admonished me, that it was better to save while our family was small, than to retrench when it grew larger. When she perceived that this argument had very little force, (as indeed it grew every day weaker), and that there was nothing to be done by general admonition, she found it necessary to come to particulars. She endeavoured to convince me that I was cheated in every article of my family expenditure. By the by, it is a principle with her, that all servants are thieves. When they offer themselves to be hired, if they demand what she thinks high wages, she cannot afford to pay at the rate of a Duchess; if their demand is moderate, she is sure they

* Mr Easy alludes to the Italian epitaph, "*Stava ben, ma per star meglio, sto qui.*"

must make it up by stealing. To prove their honesty, she lays temptations in their way, and watches in a corner to catch them in the fact. In the first six months after our marriage, we had five search-warrants in the house. My groom, (as honest a fellow as ever handled a curry-comb), was indicted for embezzling oats; and though the sleek sides of my geldings gave strong testimony to his integrity, he was turned off at a day's warning. This I soon found was but a prelude to a more serious attack; and the battery was levelled on a quarter where I was but too vulnerable. I never went out to ride but I found my poor spouse in tears at my return. She had an uncle, it seems, who broke his collar-bone by a fall from a horse. My pointers stretched upon the hearth, were never beheld by her without uneasiness. They brought to her mind a third cousin who lost a finger by the bursting of a fowling-piece; and she had a sad presentiment that my passion for sport might make her one day the most miserable of women. "Sure, my dear," she would say, "you would not, for the sake of a trifling gratification to yourself, render your poor wife constantly unhappy! Yet I must be so while you keep those vicious horses and nasty curs." What could I do, Sir? A man would not chuse to pass for a barbarian.

It was a more difficult task to wean me from those social enjoyments I have mentioned, and to cure me of a dangerous appetite I had for the company of my friends. If I passed the evening in a tavern, I was sure to have a sermon against intemperance, a warning of the visible decay of my constitution, and a most moving complaint of the heaviness of those solitary hours which she spent in my absence. Those hours, indeed, she attempted sometimes to shorten, by sending my servant to acquaint me, that she had gone to bed indisposed. This device, however, after two or three repetitions, being smothered by my companions, I was forced to vindicate my honour before them, by kicking the messenger down stairs.

Matters were yet worse with me, when I ventured to invite my old cronies to a friendly supper at my own house. In place of that ease and freedom which indicates a cordial reception, they found, on my wife's part, a cold and stiff formality, which repressed all social enjoyment; and the nonsensical parade of a figure of empty shew upon the table, which convinced them of the trouble their visit had occasioned. Under this impression, you may believe, there is no great danger of a debauch in my house. Indeed my wife commonly sits out the company. If it happens otherwise, we have a stated allowance of wine, and if more is called for, it is so long a-coming, that my friends take the hint, and wish me a good night.

But even were I more at liberty to indulge my social disposition than I unfortunately find myself, there are other reasons, no less powerful, which would prevent me from inviting my friends to my house. My wife, Sir, is absolutely unfit for any kind of rational conversation. Bred from her infancy under an old maiden aunt, who had the management of her father's household and country farm, she has no other ideas than what are accommodated to that station. Unluckily her transplantation to town, by removing her from her calves, her pigs, and her poultry, has given her fewer opportunities of displaying the capital stock of her knowledge. She still finds, however, a tolerable variety of conversation, in the rise and fall of the markets, the qualities and prices of butcher-meat, the making of potato-starch, the comparative excellence of Leith and Kensington candles, and many other

other topics of equally amusing disquisition. Seriously, Sir, when alone I can find refuge in my books; but when with her in company, she never opens her mouth, but I am in terror for what is to come out of it.

I should perhaps complain the less of being reduced to this state of involuntary domestication, if I saw any endeavours on her part to make my home somewhat comfortable to me. I am no epicure, Mr Lounger; but I own to you I like a good dinner, and have somehow got the reputation of being a pretty good judge of wines. In this last article I piqued myself on having a critical palate; and this my friends knew so well, that I was generally consulted when their cellars needed a supply, and was sure to be summoned to give my opinion at the opening of a new hoghead, or the piercing of a butt. You may believe I took care that my own small stock of liquors should not discredit my reputation; and I have often, with some exultation, heard it remarked, that there was no such claret in Edinburgh as Bob Easy's *yellow seal*.

Good claret, which I have long been accustomed to consider as a *panacea* for all disorders, my wife looks upon as little better than slow poison. She is convinced of its pernicious effects both on my purse and constitution, and recommends to me, for the sake of both, some brewed stuff of her own, which she dignifies with the name of wine, but which to me seems nothing but ill-fermented vinegar. She tells with much satisfaction, how she has passed her *Currant wine* for *Cape*, and her *Gooseberry* for *Champaign*; but for my part, I never taste them without feeling very disagreeable effects from it; and I once drank half a bottle of her *Champaign* which gave me a colic for a week.

In the article of victuals, I am doomed to yet greater mortification. Here, Sir, my wife's frugality is displayed in a most remarkable manner. As every thing is to be bought when at the lowest price, she lays in during the summer all her stores for the winter. For six months we live upon salt-provisions, and the rest of the year on fly-blown lamb and stale mutton. If a joint is roasted the one day, it is served cold the next, and hashed on the day following. All poultry is contraband. Fish (unless salt herrings, and dried ling, when got a bargain) I am never allowed to taste.

Thus mortified in my appetites, divorced as I am from my friends, having "lost all my mirth, and foregone all custom of my exercise," I am told that even my face and figure are totally changed; and, in place of the jolly careless air of a *bon-vivant*, I have got the sneaking look and starved appearance of a poor wretch escaped from a spunging-house, and dreading a dun in every human being that accosts him.—That it should come to this!—But I am determined no longer to endure it. My wife shall read this letter in my presence; and, while she contemplates her own picture, I shall take my measures according to the effect it produces on her. If she takes it as she ought 'tis well;—if not, and a rupture is the consequence, still better—I shall be my own man again.

I am, Sir, yours, &c.

ROBERT EASY.

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